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ABSTRACT

A comparison of the salient characteristics of Canadian and United States bilingual education programs suggests various settings where it would be desirable to introduce children to schooling in their home language. These settings include: (1) the various ethnic communities in the United States, (2) multilingual developing countries, (3) parts of Canada where groups of non-English-speaking residents have congregated and where the home language is one of lower ascribed social or economic status, (4) places where there does not exist uniformly high pressure within the home and community to encourage literacy and language maintenance, and (5) places where many teachers in the educational system are unaware of or insensitive to the values and traditions of the minority-group pupils. The schooling should take the form of a carefully developed language arts program integrated into a general curriculum in which content material is also taught in the native language. This will sustain and nurture children's linguistic and cognitive development while teaching the second language and gradually introducing the content materials in the second language, without abandoning the language arts or content material taught in the native language. Immersion in the target language is not recommended, although in some social settings where the home language is highly valued, parents and peer groups actively encourage literacy and native language maintenance, and the children's success is encouraged, schooling can begin in the second language. (MSE)

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Implications for U.S. Bilingual Education: Evidence from Canadian Research

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This paper was delivered at the Third Annual National Title VII Bilingual Education Management Institute, November 4-8, 1979, in Washington, D.C. It also appeared in the November 1979 issue of the NABE News.

Over the last 15 years, Wally Lambert and I have been concerned with questions of bilingual education and the role of language in education not only in Canada but also in many parts of the world. Much of the research that has been done in places such as Canada or other parts of the world does have direct reference and application to the United States.

During the past year or so, it has become increasingly clear that, despite explicit warnings to the contrary, many American educators have interpreted the abundant Canadian research data (summarized by Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Swain, 1974; Swain, 1976; Swain, 1978) as offering empirical support for the immediate submersion or mainstreaming of limited or non-English-speaking youngsters in monolingual English-medium classrooms. They have claimed that the Canadian research has demonstrated that a child—any child, English, Canadian, Mexican American, ethnic Chinese—can learn a second language and content material simultaneously. Although this general assertion is, in all probability, correct, it does not mean that the most effective way to educate every child, regardless of demographic, sociopolitical, or other circumstances, is by submersion in a second language.

I'd like to summarize the salient characteristics of the Canadian experience and to try to draw generalizations regarding what we have learned. Then, I'd like to summarize very briefly the salient characteristics of United States bilingual education and see what interface there is, if any, between the two systems.

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The Canadian Experience

Let us consider for a moment the circumstances under which the Canadian "immersion" programs (which Canadian educators refer to as "bilingual education" programs) were undertaken and from which the data were collected.

1. The French-immersion programs have been designed for Anglophone youngsters in response to continued parental dissatisfaction with the level of French attained by children participating in English instructional programs with French-as-a-second-language components. For the most part, the participating youngsters speak, as their mother tongue, English, the language of higher prestige and higher ascribed status. Within the North American setting, the target language French has relatively lower ascribed social and economic status even though it, too, is an important world language and the individual who adds French to his/her repertoire, particularly in Canada, is likely to benefit.

2. Participants in the immersion programs throughout Canada have, for the most part, come from families of middle to lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds.

3. Participation in such programs has always been voluntary, and parents have always had the alternative of sending their children to traditional schools in the immediate neighborhoods which offer instruction only in English.

4. Parents have, from the very beginning of the programs, played an extremely strong and catalytic role in all aspects of program design, development, and implementation. In fact, it was parents—rather than school board officials, teachers, or university scholars—who relentlessly pressured school board officials to develop this innovative approach to second language teaching.

5. The early immersion approach most typically implemented involves introducing children to school in French, the second language, from the very beginning. French is used for all initial readiness activities and it is the language of initial reading instruction. For the most part, the language skills of entering children are uniform. All speak English as their mother tongue and live in neighborhoods populated by English-speaking playmates. They speak virtually no French upon entrance.

6. Despite the fact that French is used as a major medium of primary instruction, an English language arts component is, nevertheless, added to the curriculum during grade two or grade three at the option of the principal. This addition serves to mark explicitly the continuing

importance or status of English as a valued language and helps to solidify formal language skills. The programs which are designed and which are encouraged are maintenance bilingual programs and are intended to lead toward what Wally Lambert has called "additive" bilingualism, the addition of another language without giving up one's own language.

7. The Canadian federal government provides financial support for innovative second language teaching. In fact, in FY 1979, it provided $170 million vs. approximately $150 million in the United States (for a Canadian population of 22 million vs. a U.S. population of 220 million). The important difference, however, lies not so much in the amount of the support but in the way the government of Canada allocates the funds. It does so on a per capita basis to the provinces which then distribute funds to the local educational agencies —a format quite different from that followed in the United States.

These general features characterize the programs which now exist in many communities throughout all ten Canadian provinces. It is not appropriate in this paper to reiterate in detail the research results reported to date. However, by way of summary, the consensus of researchers who have worked with large groups of different children participating over long periods of time in programs in different schools, school boards, and provinces is that, for these youngsters, an innovative approach to second language teaching in which the target language is used as the sole or major medium of classroom communication facilitates second language acquisition without causing any detrimental effects whatsoever to native language development or to general cognitive or social development. In addition, the youngsters perform as well as their English-taught peers on achievement tests in content areas such as math, science, or social studies (cf., Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Swain, 1976; Cziko, Lambert, Sidoti , and Tucker, 1978).

Conclusions from the Canadian Experience

On the basis of evidence such as this, we have argued (Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Tucker, 1977a; Tucker, 1977b) that in settings where the home language is highly valued by all members of the community, where parents actively provide encouragement and support for the acquisition of literacy in the mother tongue, and where a community stereotype exists that the children will succeed, it would seem fully appropriate to begin schooling in the second language. But, these are very restricted conditions under which we would make this recommendation. These inferences also find support in the research and theorizing of Skutnabb-Kangas (1975) and of Cummins (1978) who proposed that a child must attain a threshold level of competence in the target language to be able to profit from instruction in that language. That is, there is a threshold or a minimal level of linguistic competence that must be reached to avoid cognitive disadvantage as well as to allow the beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to accrue. Furthermore, the development of second language skills is dependent upon the adequate development of mother tongue skills. That is, if mother tongue skills are not adequately developed, the introduction and promotion of a second language may actually impede cognitive or linguistic growth. This critical language development is something which we believe can occur at home, which we think it seems to do in Canada, or obviously in school. So we want to look at what is causing this to happen in a corporal school environment or in a stimulating nonschool environment.

We have not previously and we will not in the future recommend, on the basis of these careful, critical, and longitudinal studies, that Mexican American, Franco-American, or other non- or limited English-speaking youngsters in the United States be submerged in English medium programs. We believe that the appropriate inference to be drawn is exactly the opposite.

The United States

Various facets of the contemporary American experience with bilingual education have been described, and it is not the intent of this paper to repeat those descriptions (see, for example, Andersson and Boyer, 1978; Schneider, 1976; Troike, 1978b). It is relevant to note, however, that despite more than ten years of federal support for bilingual education, very little critical, empirical, or longitudinal research has been conducted. One notable exception is the evaluation of the Navajo-English bilingual program at Rock Point Community School. The interesting thing about that study is that when you look cross-sectionally at any grade (grade 3, 4, 5) you are not overwhelmed by what you see of bilingual education as revealed by yearly testing. However, when you look at the cumulative impact or when you take a retrospective look, which is now possible because these youngsters have graduated from their elementary program, what you see is indeed impressive. The gains are both statistically significant as well as psychologically meaningful. Troike (1978) provides a good summary of the scanty but relevant research as does Paulston (1977).

The intent of this section is not to bemoan the paucity of American research, but rather to attempt to identify some of the salient characteristics of American bilingual education programs.

1. Present-day American Title VII or other government-supported bilingual programs have been designed, in a sense, as compensatory or remedial programs for limited or non-English-speaking youngsters who seem unable to profit from instruction in English. Separate programs have been designed for children from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds. In 1978-79 more than 500

Title VII basic projects were funded providing bilingual education in dozens of languages plus English, the language of higher ascribed social status. Typically, but not always, the mother tongue of the participating child is a language of lower ascribed social or economic status. This has not been the case in Canada.

2. Many of the participants in bilingual programs come from families in which the parents have not completed the local equivalent of the compulsory cycle of American education. Again, this is not the case in the Canadian setting.

3. Despite the provision in Title VII legislation for parental advisory committees, many parents are sadly uninformed or misinformed about the purpose, structure, or content of bilingual education programs in their communities. A survey conducted by staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics during academic year 1978-79 revealed that many parents felt cut off from school happenings and that many schools made no attempt whatsoever to communicate with parents in their mother tongue—even though they might speak no English whatsoever. I know that's probably not the general rule, but it happens, and we have to be cognizant of it.

4. The entry-level language skills of participating children are extremely heterogeneous. A Spanish-English class may include, for example, Spanish monolingual children, Spanish dominant children, children of questionable dominance in either language, English dominant, and English monolingual children. Needless to say, it is extremely difficult for even the most talented teacher, or team teachers, to reach such a diverse clientele. Likewise, many of the children live in linguistically heterogeneous communities. They often fail to receive encouragement or support from parents or peers to pursue extracurricular academic interests.

5. Unfortunately, in many communities negative stereotypes characterize the minority-group child, and it is "known" (i.e., assumed) that a disproportionately high number will be academically unsuccessful.

6. Federal legislation explicitly encourages transitional bilingual education. This legislation seems, on the one hand, designed to nurture the child's mother tongue and to encourage conceptual development in the strong language while introducing a second language; but, on the other hand, it abruptly withdraws recognition and credibility for the mother tongue as soon as possible and, in most cases, before the building blocks of the mother tongue have been solidified.

7. To date, there continues to be a scarcity of teachers trained explicitly to work in bilingual programs. Waggoner (1979) noted the discouraging fact that fewer than one half of teachers teaching through a non-English language, teaching ESL, or doing both had had even one bilingual education course, and only fourteen percent had had relevant training for teaching non-English language arts and content areas. Likewise, there exists a serious need for the continued development and improvement of curricula, materials, and testing instruments.

At this point, it is appropriate to reiterate that the scanty research evidence alluded to earlier (Rosier and Holm, in press; Troike, 1978a) does suggest that children will thrive when they are educated initially in their mother tongue and then later bilingually in carefully designed and well-implemented programs by sensitive teachers working in communities where there exists widespread knowledge and support for bilingual education.

Implications for U.S. Bilingual Education

The information summarized above, including a description of some of the salient and criterial attributes of Canadian, selected third-world, and American bilingual programs, leads to the following general conclusion: it would seem desirable to introduce children to schooling in their home language in settings such as the various ethnic communities in the United States, in multilingual developing countries, and in parts of Canada where groups of non-English/non-French-speaking residents have congregated and where the home language is one of lower ascribed social or economic status; where there does not exist uniformly high pressure within the home and community to encourage literacy and language maintenance; where many teachers in the educational system are unaware or insensitive to the values and traditions of the minority-group pupils. This schooling should take the form of a carefully developed language arts program integrated into a general curriculum in which content material is also taught in the mother tongue. The purpose is to sustain and to nurture youngsters' linguistic and cognitive development while teaching the second language and gradually introducing content materials in the second language, without abandoning the language arts or the content material taught in the mother tongue. This approach is consistent with the earlier suggestions of Lambert and Tucker (1972), Cummins (1978), Skutnabb-Kangas (1975), and Ojerinde and Cziko (1978). Furthermore, it should be added that there is no indication whatsoever from any research literature that transitional bilingual programs are pedagogically more effective than maintenance programs.

The claim that the results from studies of Canadian immersion programs lead to the conclusion that minority group youngsters in the United States, Canada, or the third world should be immersed or submerged in the target language is false. These results do, however, suggest that in certain social settings where the home language is highly valued, where parents and peer groups actively encourage literacy and mother tongue maintenance, and where it is assumed that the

children will succeed, schooling can appropriately and without detriment commence in the second language. In fact, it has been argued elsewhere that the central problem facing us is to reach the "dominant-group" American in an attempt to drive home sensitivity to, awareness of, and interest in cultural diversity. I feel that one of the best ways of doing so is to encourage the development of immersion programs for Anglophone American youngsters.

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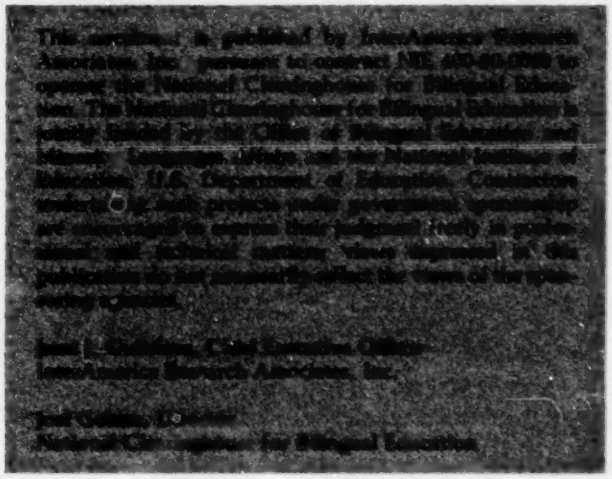

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